

Points of Interest - - - Summer - -- (June - August 2005)

Thursday, May 12, 2005

12:30 PM Introduction & Playgrounds

Location: Oak Lake Park (1st & Charleston (Sun Valley Blvd) - Picnic Shelter

Lynn - Hi, I'm Lynn Johnson and welcome to Lincoln Parks and Recreation's "Points of Interest". Summer is a great time to get out and visit your city Parks, Trails and Golf Courses. On today's show we will visit some areas that are becoming quite popular with bird watchers families and conservationists. We will also meet with a few of the people at Parks and Recreation who help develop safe and fun playgrounds for you and your family. We will talk with Officer Hellmutter about trail etiquette and safety, and get a golf tip or two from Corey Fletcher out at Mahoney Golf Course. So stay with us for a while and see what Lincoln Parks and Recreation is doing for you to "Make Lincoln a Better Place to Live."

I'm here at Oak Lake Park, the beautiful and serene location of Lincoln's annual 4th of July celebration again this year; however, in 1919 few people would have considered this area to be beautiful or serene as Oak Lake Park was city dump that covered 150 acres. As plans for a new highway were proposed, the dump was deemed too unsightly for a main entrance to the Capitol City. So by 1929 at a rate of about 10 - 15 acres a year, Oak Lake Park was slowly turned into a city park with grass, trees, shrubs, baseball diamonds, football fields, and playgrounds. Between 1929 and 1931 a 38 acre lake was developed and became quite the hot spot for boating. The City even provided citizens with a boathouse which housed 10 row boats, 1 motor boat and numerous private craft.

Today Oak Lake Park is an 187 acre in size, and is divided by the very highway which was the reason behind its existence. To this day the I-180 still serves as an important entrance into Lincoln and as you travel the highway you can glance over at the park and see any

number of people picnicking, fishing, walking dogs at the dog run, or playing with their kids at this playground. Bill Weddle and Jerry Shorney are here today to talk about playgrounds and our mission here at Parks and Recreation to keep all of our playgrounds safe and accessible for you and your family.

Lynn- Jerry, Parks and Recreation manages over 80 playgrounds. What does it take to manage that many sites?

Jerry- Lynn, Parks and Recreation has a playground crew of highly skilled people who work together to fulfill our mission of creating fun, safe, clean, and quality playgrounds within all areas of the city. These people do everything from making daily safety inspections for needed equipment and vandalism repairs to daily maintenance and clean-up. We also have staff who have become certified designers and installers who are required to retain their certification status by going through intense training every 3 years. These certified personnel then do in-house training to keep our maintenance crews updated on current safety standards for playgrounds. We also have an ongoing renovation program to keep all playgrounds safe and accessible.

Lynn- Bill, I know that you are one of our certified inspectors, can you tell us why there is a need to have such training and how it is put to use?

Bill-

- Historically, playground design and maintenance did not have standards and guidelines which resulted in hazardous conditions causing injuries; some which resulted in permanent disabilities and loss of life. This in turn brought about legal action against public playground managers.
- The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and The American Society for

Testing and Materials (ASTM) developed standard guidelines to assist public playground managers in design and maintenance of their facilities.

- LPR follows these guidelines when designing and maintaining our facilities and only installs equipment from Manufacturers that also follow these guidelines.

Lynn: Tell us more about the requirements and safety considerations for playgrounds?

Bill -

- One of the most important aspects of our new or renovated playgrounds is the surfacing. We use 12" thick sand/gravel for the swing areas and recycled rubber tile matting under the composite play structures. These surfaces provide an approved cushion should someone fall, and the rubber tile also helps us comply with ADA requirements.
- Playground equipment is manufactured for two basic user groups, children ages 2-5 years, and children 5-12 years of age. The safety guidelines are developed with the abilities of these user groups in mind. For example the swing seats for the 2-5 year age group are more restrictive "bucket" type seats than the "belt" type seats used by the 5-12 year age group.
- Each playground equipment piece has a "use zone" minimum distance of 6 feet in diameter and cannot overlap with a "use zone" of another piece. This distance increases according to the height of a playground equipment piece. For example the "use zone" of a spring rider is 6 feet in diameter while the "use zone" of a swing unit is 32 feet.

Lynn - Stay with us and we'll be back with Jerry and Bill and more information about playground safety.

PSA -

Lynn - Thanks for staying with us. I'm Lynn Johnson and this is Lincoln Park and Recreation's Points of Interest. I'm here with Jerry Shorney and Bill Weddle and we are talking about playgrounds in Lincoln. Specifically, how they are planned, designed, and developed in accordance to national safety standards in order to make them safe for you and your family.

Lynn - Briefly take me through the process of developing a playground. What's the first step?

Bill or Jerry??- Well, Lynn, first a Lincoln Parks and Recreation Park Planner creates a master plan which shows where the park features will generally be located. One of the park features is typically a playground. We start by conducting a site survey which includes gathering grade elevation data, existing landscape features, drainage patterns, visibility from existing streets, and in the case of a renovation, existing park features. This data is all used in determining the best location of the playground.

Lynn: After the location is determined what happens?

Bill or Jerry - We develop construction plans which show all of the playground equipment locations within the playground footprint as per the CPSC and ASTM guidelines. The equipment is ordered from one of our playground equipment vendors. Once the equipment has been delivered our playground installation crew begins the construction process as per the master and playground plans.

Lynn - Where does the playground installation crew begin?

Prior to the installation of the playground equipment but after site grading, our concrete crew installs the sidewalks and concrete pad that the main playground piece will sit on. I think it is important to credit all of our staff at this time; we have our own electrician, plumbers and concrete professionals who do an excellent job, often the equipment suppliers agree that their

people can't do as good of a job as our staff. While the concrete is curing we might move on to the installation of pieces that are installed in areas where the playground surface will be gravel instead of safety tiles, such as swings. Next play equipment is installed on the concrete pad. When we have at least 4 days of 60 degree dry weather we can glue down the safety tiles which will cover the concrete pad where the main piece will sit. After the safety tiles are down, climbers, slides and decks are carefully constructed by our certified installers. Each piece is placed together in the correct order and fastened according to specifications. Not only does having our people certified save the city money but it also gives us satisfaction knowing exactly how each piece works and what it takes to maintain the integrity of the equipment. Before long, the new playground is finished and nearly before the caution tape is removed, kids and families are enjoying their new playground.

Lynn: Are all playgrounds created the same?

Jerry: Lynn, we have different sizes of playgrounds in all parts of the city. Generally, these range in size according to the designated type of park. Some playgrounds like the one at Max E. Roper Park East are considered to be a neighborhood park and have more playground pieces than mini parks like the one outside F Street Community Center. Community Parks like here at Oak Lake Park are slightly larger than Neighborhood parks, and regional playgrounds such as Holmes Park are considerably larger.

Lynn: So each playground has the same safety requirements for the installed pieces but may vary in the amount of pieces that each park has?

Jerry: That is correct Lynn. Of course we do have the occasional times when someone wishes to

donate additional funds or equipment to create a slightly larger playground. They might also add a park shelter, a drinking fountain, a basketball court, or a trash receptacle or two. Programs such as the Community Action Program which is available to Neighborhood Associations and Community Groups each fall has helped many such groups add elements to their neighborhood park, playground, or trail.

Lynn: Jerry, I know playgrounds can cost quite a bit of money, how much do these playgrounds cost and where does the funding come from?

Jerry: Lynn each playground differs from one another but generally a playground the size of this one here ranges from \$80,000 to \$100,000. A playground the size of the one you saw in the video ranges from \$50,000 to \$65,000. Most of the funding for playgrounds comes from the Parks and Recreation CIP budget but other sources of funding do become available from time to time. Other funding sources include recycled rubber grants, Homeowners Associations, Neighborhood Associations, Memorials and Donations.

Lynn: Thanks Jerry and Bill for talking with us today. I know that both of you are dedicated to safe and fun playgrounds. I am also sure that those watching us today are grateful for you and everyone who makes it possible for them to enjoy their favorite playgrounds in a safe, comfortable, and nearby location. Thanks again.

Lynn: Stay with us, we'll be right back with more Points of Interest.

Info Ad - *Watering Your Newly Planted Trees*

Steve Schwab - Hello, this is Steve Schwab, Lincoln's City Forester. Reminding you that it is crucial to the vitality of your newly planted street tree to get adequate watering this summer. Start by either running a garden hose to your tree or by using buckets to transport water to your tree. The garden hose should be turned on at a trickle for about an hour once a week. Watering at this rate will slowly saturate the roots. If you use a bucket, slowly pour about 10 gallons of water around the base of the tree once a week. Here's some guidelines to remember.

- 1 Water once a week (1 hour per trunk inch) during dry spells
- 2 Don't overwater - too much will kill trees
- 3 Sprinkler Systems are not adequate for watering trees
- 4 Use a garden hose or a 5 gallon pail
- 5 And please also remember to follow any water restrictions in the area where you live.

By following these guidelines for watering your newly planted trees and for your established trees you can anticipate years of beauty and shade and feel proud that you have helped sustain them for generations to come.

1:15 - 1:30 Trail Safety & Etiquette - Lynn & Officer Jason Hellmuth
Location: NW 12th & Highlands Blvd.

Hello and welcome back to Points of Interest. Lincoln has an extensive commuter and recreational trail system. When planning for bike trails the goal is to have a bike trail within one mile of all residences in the city making them convenient for everyone to get to. Some key destinations for trail users include schools, parks, and commercial areas. Whether you are an experienced rider or just use trails on an occasional basis, we want you and your family to be aware of safety. Crime Prevention Officer for the Lincoln Police Department, Jason Hellmuth is here today with some rules and regulations for you to use when out on the trails.

Lynn - Welcome, Officer Hellmuth; thanks for being here today. Who may use the trail system, runners, walkers, bike riders, anyone else?

Officer Hellmuth - Any runner, walker or bike rider can use the trails.

Those persons walking should stay to the right of the trail. Cyclists are encouraged to say “passing on your left” when passing walkers and slower cyclists.

Lynn - Are motor vehicles allowed on the trail, such as mopeds, mini-bikes or electric scooters?

Officer Hellmuth - No, the only motorized vehicles that would be allowed on Lincoln Trails are motorized wheelchairs or other handicapped personal transport devices or approved city vehicles.

Lynn - Must a person riding a bike wear a helmet on the trail system?

Officer Hellmuth - No, the City of Lincoln has no Ordinance that requires any person who rides a bicycle or skateboard to wear a helmet when riding, but it is a piece of safety equipment that is strongly encouraged.

Lincoln City Ordinance does require that any bicycle operated at night have an operable headlight and taillight.

Lynn - What are some safety tips when it comes to using the Lincoln Trail system?

Officer Hellmuth -

Wear brightly colored clothing (night or day)

Preferably use the trails during the day

Stay on well lit paths if walking at night

Carry a cell phone with you

Use the “buddy” system. Walk with another person if possible.

When using the trail system, do not wear headphones (or at least keep the volume down) so you are aware of other pedestrians, bike riders and other traffic concerns.

Be aware of your surroundings and the people around you while you are walking.

If possible, do not carry any expensive electronic items or valuables with you as they can be a target of criminals in a “snatch and grab” robbery

If you do not have a cell phone, let someone know when you are leaving and when you expect to return.

Lynn - When approaching intersections of the trail systems, what is the safe way to cross them?

Officer Hellmuth - Look both ways and then look again before crossing off the trail onto a street or public sidewalk. Be particularly aware of vehicles turning right. Also do the same when entering one of the trails, as trails are used by both walkers and bike riders.

Lynn - Should cyclists dismount and walk their bicycle across intersection crossings?

Officer Hellmuth - Yes, City Ordinance requires that all bicyclists must yield right of way to vehicles when crossing a street or city roadway. If you walk your bicycle across an intersection crossing area, you are regarded by law as a pedestrian and are afforded the right of way.

This does not allow you “walk against the light” however.

Lynn - What kind of patrol is there on the bike trails?

Officer Hellmuth - There is no devoted patrol solely designated to the trails. However, during the spring, summer and fall months, the geographical teams may organize “special details” regarding the trails if there have been incidents on the trails to warrant the officers attention. Some officers may occasionally patrol by foot or bicycle, trails that are in their area however, it is only when staffing and activity allow for it.

Lynn - If someone comes across a problem on a trail such as someone harassing them or felt that someone was up to no good and felt their safety was in danger, what should they do?

Officer Hellmuth - If a person using the trails at any time sees a criminal action occurring, feels that persons or incidents are endangering their safety or sees a person acting suspiciously, they are encouraged to contact the police via their cell phone or the nearest phone they can find.

Lynn - What about pets on the trails? What is ordinance and what is etiquette?

Officer Hellmuth - City ordinance allows for pets to be in parks and other city roadways and streets, so long as it is a permitted area for the pet and the animal (defined as dog or any other animal) is on a leash. As the trail system is city-maintained, the same provisions apply. (Unless outside of the city limits.) (6.08.130 & 6.10.070) The lease should be no longer than 6 feet.

Proper etiquette would be to have the animal walking on your side that is facing away from oncoming pedestrians and bicyclists. Persons walking their pets on the city’s trail system must “pick up the waste and dispose of it in a trash receptacle”. (6.08.155)

Lynn - Thanks for being here today, Officer Hellmuth, and thanks for all the good information.

Aside from the physical fitness benefits one can receive from using the trails; trails can play an important role in our community by providing an alternative to the automobile, reduce

traffic congestion, improve air quality, and help to create a more balanced transportation system. We encourage you to get out and explore the vast network of hike/biker trails here in Lincoln. For more information about trails visit lincoln.ne.gov Keyword: trails. We'll be right back.

2:00 PM Prairie in the Parks - Jerry & Lynn

Lynn - Hello, I'm Lynn Johnson and welcome back to our show. Land conservation practices are one our Department's tools for land management. I'm here at Highlands South Park which was originally an outlot retained by the City as part of the annexation of the Highlands area. Whereas the nearby Highlands Park already served the area outdoor recreation and open space needs, it was decided to develop the Highlands South Park a bit differently. Plans for this park included planting 3/4 of the park to native grasses, constructing a recreational trail, refurbishing its wetlands, and establishing two grassed play fields. The area behind me is filled with native grasses and were established between 1999 and 2003. It was around this same time we decided to formalize a program called "Prairie in Our Parks" to help manage areas, like here at Highlands South, in a conservation friendly and maintenance reducing way. Jerry Shorney our Assistant Director of Park Operations and his staff are the people who prepare, plant, and maintain these areas. Jerry is here today to tell us more about the "Prairies in Our Parks" program.

Jerry, thanks for being here today. Can you describe the program and tell us what is the purpose of "Prairie in our Parks"?

Jerry - The "Prairie in Our Parks" program is intended to create and manage designated areas of native grasses and wildflowers in parks. Typically these areas will be planted to low and medium height native grasses and complimentary wildflowers. In some areas, wetland areas and other areas of native vegetation will be included. The designated areas will be identified with signage, and ultimately included in a brochure with a map of the locations of areas of native plantings, and descriptions and drawings of typical plants in the areas.

This will

- **Increase the visual diversity and aesthetic appearance of park areas;**
- **Increase wildlife habitat value of park areas:**
- **Provide opportunities for increased public education and appreciation of native landscape areas; and**
- **Reduce long-term maintenance costs.**

Lynn - What is the goal for conversion of mowed park areas to native/conservation grass areas?

Jerry - We currently maintain around 6000 acres of parkland. What we would like to have at

this time is about 10% of this parkland be converted to prairie department wide.

Lynn - What are the annual budget implications of the program and are there potential grant sources or partners to assist with implementation of the program?

Jerry - Lynn, our current limited investment is about \$5000 per year for seed. In about 2001 we purchased a native grass seed drill. This has been very effective in allowing our in-house staff to phase in native plantings. This phasing in of plantings will expand the prairie plantings at a level we can maintain with our limited resources. These plantings are also expected to help reduce overall maintenance costs by minimizing mowing hours.

Lynn - What will be the process for establishing stands of native and conservation grasses?

Jerry - Often times our native grass drill allows us to plant into existing turf areas. Potential sites are evaluated for the best method to introduce native grasses. Sometimes bare ground is prepared, sometimes interplanting will be successful. Seed mixes will be selected for their ornamental value, wildlife habitat value and suitability to soil conditions of particular sites. Additional showy annual wildflowers will be planted with the grasses to provide additional color and appeal as the grasses are getting established and maturing. Certain areas may be suitable for displays of perennial wildflowers.

Lynn - What management practices will be used to sustain established stands of native and conservation grasses?

Jerry - Burning is a common method for prairie grass management where it is compatible with adjoining land uses. But in urban settings chemical & manual maintenance to reduce weed infestations and woody plants will be used.

Lynn - What is the key to the success of this program?

Jerry - We at Parks and Recreation know that public education is the key to the success and acceptance of this program - signage, public dialogue, sound environmental practices, cost savings all need to be communicated to our community.

Golf Tips - Mahoney
(Location- Mahoney Golf)
Corey Fletcher -

Exit -

Lynn - In closing todays show, I'd like to recognize one of Lincoln's many citizens who help "Make Lincoln a Better Place to Live". Sandy Smith was recognized as a Park Angel for her contributions for the repair of a vandalized statue at the Antelope Park Rose Garden. Sandy used her tip money from her waitress job to pay for over 3/4 of the needed repair work. This equated to over \$900. (Soundbites from conferences)

Thanks Sandy, and thanks to everyone watching today. Lincoln has over 60 miles of trails, 116 parks, 81 playgrounds, 5 golf courses, and 11 pools. That equates to a ton of fun. We hope to see you and your family at these facilities sometime soon and that you found something on today,' show to be a 'Point of Interest' to you. See you next time?